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SUBJECT: LIBERIA: RULING PARTY EXECUTIVES HOLD EXTRAORDINARY
SESSION

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REF: A) MONROVIA 487 B) MONROVIA 549

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Over 100 executive members of the ruling Unity Party (U.P.), including President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, attended a one-day extraordinary party conference on July 11. Party executives agreed to hold a national convention in October 2009 where all leadership positions will be contested. Party leaders also officially endorsed the U.P.'s merger with the Liberia Action Party (LAP) and the Liberia Unification Party (LUP) and commended the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) for its successful conclusion. The occurrence of an October 2009 party conference aimed at consolidating the merger under new leadership is further evidence that President Sirleaf will likely run for re-election.
END SUMMARY.

EXTRAORDINARY SESSION SOLIDIFIES PARTY EXPANSION

¶2. (SBU) Executives of the Unity Party (U.P.) ratified by general consensus, the article of merger signed with the Liberia Action Party (LAP) and the Liberia Unification Party (LUP) in a one-day extraordinary party conference on July 11. (NOTE. The expanded party is expected to maintain the "Unity Party" label. END NOTE.) U.P.'s merger with the LAP and the LUP has made the holding of a national convention imperative. U.P. Secretary General Henry B. Fahnbulleh told Political Assistant that the three constituent parts of the enlarged U.P. agreed during merger talks to bring the party's convention, originally scheduled for mid-2010, forward to October ¶2009. Members will elect new party leaders, but Fahnbulleh did not say which positions will be awarded to the LUP and LAP. Fahnbulleh also said that U.P. Chairman Charles Clarke will step down as party chairman during the convention.

NATIONAL CONVENTION TO BE HELD IN TAYLOR STRONGHOLD

¶3. (SBU) The National Convention is expected to attract more than 500 delegates from the 16 counties to Gbarnga in Bong County. The U.P. hopes to build support in a region that has been a stronghold of former President Charles Taylor's supporters and his National Patriotic Party (NPP). Taylor's ex-wife Jewel Howard-Taylor is also the county's senior senator and the U.P. hopes to cut into the Taylors' local base.

¶4. (SBU) The U.P.'s next Chairman and Secretary General are expected to be drawn from the LAP and LUP. The question remains whether Vice President Joseph Boakai will be President Sirleaf's running mate during her likely 2011 election campaign or be replaced by another politician, such as LAP former presidential candidate Varney Sherman, to consolidate the expanded party. Sirleaf is reported to have called on "some officials of her party to swallow the bitter pill" and make way for officials of the LUP and LAP. At the same time, Sirleaf has maintained public support for her vice president.

U.P. COMMENDS TRC AND PRESIDENT SIRLEAF

15. (U) During the extraordinary session, party executives commended TRC commissioners on the completion of their mandate and release of their final report (Ref A). The leadership also encouraged partisans not to make disparaging statements against TRC commissioners and employees. They acknowledged that doing so would be counterproductive to U.P. ideals and aspirations.

16. (U) At the end of the one-day session, U.P. leaders presented a seven-point resolution to President Sirleaf in which they renewed their support for her administration, calling it "excellent." They also reaffirmed the party's "abiding faith in her ability as she continues to steer the affairs of the state." They also directed the national secretariat of the party to expeditiously reactivate all of the party's branches and offices throughout the country.

17. (SBU) COMMENT. Even though President Sirleaf has not publicly declared her intention to contest the 2011 elections, the unflinching support and loyalty pledged to her by executives of the party is yet another veiled indication that she intends to run for re-election. The U.P. seems to be embarking upon an early strategic plan aimed at concentrating its efforts on Gbarnga and outlying provinces to undermine support for former President Charles Taylor and his wife. President Sirleaf has focused attention on this region by selecting Gbarnga as the site of this year's July 26 Independence Day celebration (Ref B). We expect the October convention to fully seal the merger with the LAP and LUP by placing officials from these parties into the U.P.'s leadership and lay the foundation for Sirleaf's re-election effort. END COMMENT.

THOMAS-GREENFELD